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ABSTRACT

This concise report, one of a series, focuses attention on the topic of correlation of work in the foreign language class with drill in the language laboratory. Viewing the attitude of the language teacher as the critical factor in this problem, the author presents fundamental material on: (1) selection of appropriate materials, (2) the use of careful scheduling of laboratory periods, (3) detailed programing of what is to be presented in class and in the laboratory to insure appropriate correspondence, (4) physical presence of the teacher in the laboratory during drill sessions whenever possible, and (5) use of the language laboratory for testing. Reference to other pertinent documents is made. (RL)

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Number 13

Correlation of Language Class and Language Laboratory

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CORRELATION OF LANGUAGE CLASS AND LANGUAGE LABORATORY

by E. Daymond Turner, Jr.

Common sense would indicate that if the laboratory experience is to be meaningful to either teacher or learner, there must be a direct relationship between what goes on in the language laboratory and what takes place in the foreign language classroom.[1]

The quarter century since members of our profession first began to experiment with the use of primitive wire recorders has seen the development of an extensive literature dealing with the rationale of audio-lingual teaching, the techniques of language laboratory planning and operation, the values unique to laboratory instruction, and the development and programming of instructional materials.[2] Yet examination of the foreign language programs at many secondary schools and colleges reveals the existence of an instructional gap between the laboratory and classroom almost as wide and as deep as the generation gap which afflicts other aspects of American education. The result in a number of institutions has been to convert expensive laboratory installations into what one critic has termed "electronic graveyards", sitting empty and unused, or perhaps somewhat glorified study halls to which students grudgingly repair to don headphones, turn down the volume, and prepare the next period's history or English lesson, unmolested by any member of the foreign language faculty.[3]

The classroom teacher is the critical factor in the correlation of language laboratory and class. Unless he (or she) accepts the fourfold goals of audio-lingual instruction and is emotionally as well as intellectually aware of the unique contributions to language learning which can be offered by the language laboratory,[4] broken equipment will not be repaired, voluntary attendance will dwindle, and student attitude will provide an accurate mirror of the indifference or hostility towards the laboratory which is sensed in the classroom.

The teacher <u>can</u> make a positive contribution to laboratory effectiveness in the following areas, which we shall discuss at more length: (1) selection of appropriate materials; (2) the use of careful scheduling of laboratory periods; (3) detailed programming of what is to be presented in class and in the laboratory to insure appropriate correspondence; (4) physical presence in the laboratory during drill sessions whenever possible; and, (5) use of the language laboratory for testing.

MATERIALS

It is axiomatic that no teacher is ever completely satisfied with any text; nevertheless, in contrast with the situation which prevailed as recently as a decade ago, there are today a considerable number of commercially prepared language-learning packages of text, tapes, test materials, teacher's manual, visual aids, and the like, which are quite adequate for effective audio-lingual instruction. In those public elementary and secondary schools where these have been adopted on a system-wide basis the physiological readiness of the individual teacher is the key to success or failure. But even in the larger school systems, an individual may, from time to time, hope to influence the selection of materials.

And in private schools, as well as in colleges and universities, the choice of texts may become an almost annual problem. Several years ago, while on the staff of an NDEA Summer Language Institute at Utah State University, I developed a checklist of "Criteria for Selecting Materials for Language Laboratory Use." I find them to be still valid, with slight modifications.

General

1. Plan ahead. That is, look for materials which will serve a sequence of two or more years, either per se or in conjunction with other materials selected at the same time. (This is peculiarly important at the college level where there is a tendency to choose materials semester by semester with little regard for either what has come before or what should logically come after.)

2. Beware of "re-treads." The availability of exercise tapes, records, and visual aids for a well-seasoned traditional text will not automatically make it audio-lingual or suitable for laboratory use.

3. Be sure there is enough drill material. Properly constructed audio-lingual drills can and should provide more than ten times as many opportunities for practice within a given time as an older text. It is better to have to omit a few drills than to have to make your own daily, or to repeat the same few exercises ad nauseam.

4. Both audio and visual materials presented in the laboratory must have a direct relationship to what is going on in the classroom. At the elementary level, they may well be the same materials in an identical or a slightly different format. For intermediate and advanced courses, they can include supplementary materials to provide review and expansion of classroom skills.

Audio Materials

Seek:

1. High quality of recording.

2. A variety of native voices, representing differing sexes and age levels.

3. Recording at native fluency. (In general, professors—even those who are native speakers of the target language—do not make the best lesson tapes. Most sound too "teachery." The same reservation applies to the professional actor.)

4. Pacing that will contribute to automaticity of response. (For drill tapes, this means relatively short pauses. Pacing is also important in maintaining student interest.)

5. The correct answer should always follow the first pause for reinforcement or self-correction. This applies to teaching tapes.

6. There should be a variety of drills.

7. Test tapes should demand more than selection of a multiple-choice option or auditory comprehension, i.e., each test should require an active response requiring some production of the target language, orally or in writing.

8. Time required for playthrough of recording and each subsection should be clearly indicated by the supplier. The timing of each drill is essential for proper planning.

Visual Materials

1. Visual materials should be culturally authentic. Such materials, whether text illustrations, films, videotape, slides, film-strips, or posters should reflect the cultural setting of a country where the language is spoken, without overemphasis on the quaint or atypical. Avoid the American high school setting, the distorted cartoon.

2. They should be free from English-language text or soundtrack.

3. If used during a pre-reading period, or for testing, they should also avoid target language text.

4. Sound motion pictures should meet the criteria for audio materials above. (This would normally rule out travelog-type narratives recorded by a single speaker.)

5. Color film is undoubtedly more attractive than black and white. However, the added cost should be weighed against other pedagogical features (such as effective portrayal of lip-movement and gesture)

SCHEDULING

The scheduling of language laboratory periods involves a number of factors: type of equipment, size of laboratory, length of laboratory periods, total number of students to be served at each level of each language, whether classes will attend the laboratory as a unit or individual students will use it on a "library-type" basis, and whether the concept of utilization is limited to materials already present in class or is expanded to include both testing and the presentation of new material. It is also important to determine whether the laboratory experience will replace a part of time previously scheduled for foreign language instruction or whether it will supplement it. I should like to comment briefly on each of these factors in light of some fifteen years of personal experimentation.

Minimal equipment should be audio-active; that is, each student should have his own headset and microphone so that he can hear his own response without the interference of bone conduction or the responses of his immediate neighbor. In this latter respect, the laboratory, with the acoustical shielding provided by properly designed booths, is superior to the so-called "electronic classroom" so dear to many public school administrators. There has been some objection to the provision of record-playback or "audio-active-compare" equipment

both on the grounds of cost and on the grounds that by the playback a student is encouraged to overlearn his own mistakes.[5] I find this latter argument invalid. It is much easier to listen for and identify errors on a playback than in the heat of a rapidly paced structural drill, and experience at several institutions convinces me that the individual recording facilities are well worth the extra cost. There should be at least twenty per cent more student stations than there are students in the largest group scheduled to use the room at any one time.[6] In many school and college situations, it may be desirable to construct what Elton Hocking has called a "jumbo lab" which is capable of accommodating several sections, or all students at a given level in a given language, at one time. Properly supervised, such large laboratories can be helpful in keeping down the number of students per section and the teaching load in the conventional classroom.

There is general agreement that the ideal laboratory period should not exceed thirty minutes in length and that short periods are more effective than long ones.[7] The frequency of laboratory exposure also appears to have some impact on results, with the feeling that one laboratory period per week has little or no impact on learning. The average college or university schedule, however, appears to militate against periods of less than fifty minutes. And, it is possible to operate the laboratory effectively for such a time span. A five-minute break at the end of the first twenty minutes, during which the student may remove his earphones and listen to music played over a speaker is one way to make the fifty-minute span endurable, if not desirable.

All of the laboratories with which I have been personally associated have offered both "broadcast-type" (regularly scheduled, teacher-selected program, and required attendance) and "library-type" (the student attends at an optional time and selects his own program) programs. The former method of scheduling facilitates the faculty supervision and laboratory tests which are essential to effective utilization.

The really critical factor in scheduling as it pertains to correlation between class and laboratory activities lies in the decision as to whether the laboratory should replace a part of the regularly scheduled class work or be superimposed upon it. The experiment in the New York City schools reported some years ago by Lorge employed this first option very effectively, and it is an appealing one where the foreign language class will in any circumstance meet daily and for a period long enough to permit this kind of division of the class period. It also presupposes a language laboratory or laboratories large enough to accommodate simultaneously all foreign language classes scheduled at a given hour and located in close physical proximity to the language classrooms, so that students can change rooms without excessive loss of time.

For the college or university course trapped in the strait jacket of the three-hour-per-week semester course, the laboratory offers the opportunity to add additional time and daily contact with the target language. From personal contacts throughout the country, I judge that while the percentage of institutions having language laboratories has increased, scheduling of the language laboratory at the college and university level is no more uniform today than it was when Helen Mayo made her survey of forty eastern colleges some seven years ago.[8] Most beginning language teachers would endorse the schedule of five

class periods plus five laboratory periods (of unspecified length) reported for beginning Spanish classes at the University of Texas in the winter of 1969. The pattern of three class hours a week and two of laboratory (laboratory periods scheduled on other than class days) currently in effect at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte seems a fairly common pattern.

For at least eleven years, the University of Delaware offered audio-lingual courses in elementary French, German, Spanish, and Russian which met three times per week in a large language laboratory and twice a week in smaller class sections for the first two semesters. At the intermediate level, the third semester course met for two hours of laboratory, two of class, and the fourth semester courses met for three hours in class and one of laboratory. Student mastery of traditional skills, as measured by the Cooperative Tests of the Educational Testing Service, and of audio-lingual skills, as measured by the Modern Language Association of America's Modern Language Proficiency Tests, indicated that the substitution of laboratory for one of the traditional weekly class meetings did not adversely affect the learning process.[9] In the opinion of the writer, the success of these courses was due to the three elements which will be discussed at more length below: careful programming of laboratory materials, supervision of laboratory by teaching staff, and frequent testing in the laboratory.

PROGRAMMING

As we pointed out earlier, adequate teaching materials are characterized by a large variety and number of drills. Effective utilization requires careful and detailed planning to an extent not required in non-laboratory courses. The individual or committee charged with such planning should prepare a syllabus specifying in detail what materials are to be employed in laboratory and in class for every scheduled meeting and for at least a semester in advance.

Time is the inflexible framework within which any such syllabus must be prepared. The laboratory part of the program should be designed to exploit a major advantage of the lab situation, namely, the possibility for active participation of every student throughout the period. Today, many publishers will furnish not only the tape-script (where this differs from what is printed in the textbook), but tables showing the precise amount of time required to conduct each drill in the laboratory. Information on tape timing is a sine qua non for efficient laboratory programming, and the availability of such information from the source might well be a factor in the choice of text. If the information is not available from the tape supplier, someone must undertake the tedious chore of compiling it by listening carefully to each lesson series with a stop watch, noting the time required for each section.

Since automaticity of response is one of the goals of audio-lingual instruction, the planner should bear in mind that drills administered in the laboratory should be administered more than once, probably at least three times per session. It is also important to provide a break where the scheduled laboratory period runs for more than thirty minutes.

Order of Presentation

I wish to take issue with those who insist that "only material which has first been presented to (the student) and subjected to the teacher's correction in class is fit material for the laboratory."[10] The laboratory can offer more authentic speech models for dialog memorization, for example, than a majority of teachers who are not themselves native speakers of the target language. In the Delaware experiments referred to above, we found that a combination of audio and visual materials (e.g., the sound motion pictures available with the first edition of Modern Spanish introduced new material more effectively than either teacher or textbook could do alone. Whether the laboratory should be used for the presentation of new material will then depend on the teacher, the kind of material, and the total amount of lab time available. But the possibility of such use should not be dismissed out of hand.

With the tape timing, the number of class and laboratory meetings with the length of each, and familiarity with the basic text plus all accompanying materials, the planner sits down to divide the lesson material into packages of reasonable length. He should remember that, because of pacing and freedom from interruption, plus the natural tendency of the instructor to temper the wind to the shorn lamb in a classroom situation, it may be possible to get in two to three times as much practice in the laboratory as in a class session of the same length. In programming for elementary and intermediate courses, I subscribe to Nelson Brooks' concept of the "bi-weekly rhythm" of language learning[11] which implies a pause for review and consolidation about every two weeks. One period should be allowed for testing, and a free period, which may be used either for going over the corrected tests in class or for catch-up and additional review, should be inserted in the syllabus at approximately two-week intervals.

Where the amount of time scheduled for class and laboratory is identical, it is possible to cover several times in the laboratory all of the materials dealt with in class. Where the number of laboratory hours per week is markedly inferior to the number of class hours, there must be a choice of which drills are to be presented for reinforcement in the laboratory. Here the teacher must be guided by his own experience to choose those structural or lexical elements most difficult for the English-speaking learner.

SUPERVISION

Recently the pedagogical value of the intercom for monitoring and laboratory supervision has been called into question, and we have even been asked whether the results justify the additional cost of such equipment. Here, as in the question of the value of individual recording equipment for each student, personal experience and that of many fellow teachers whose judgment I highly respect indicates that monitoring is worth every penny of the additional cost. It has been argued that since only one booth can be monitored by one person at one time, little attention can be given to each student individually.

This criticism is valid if the only goal of the monitor is to give every single learner an equal amount of attention. Practice as a monitor in university laboratories[12] indicates the following advantages in the physical presence of a qualified staff member at the console: (1) discipline and attendance are better than when the laboratory is unsupervised or left to student assistants; (2) level and quality of student participation are much higher; (3) such corrections as are made occur in privacy between the teacher and student concerned, i.e., the pupil is not embarrassed by being called down in front of his classmates; (4) for 90% to 95% of participants, the teacher need do little more than check the position occasionally to ensure that the learner is actively following the drill—this means that, even in a large operation, most of the monitoring time may be devoted to extra help for those few learners in any one lab section who will need it.

I concede that the learner may be thrown off stride if interrupted during the execution of a drill, and it is very hard for him to "hear" a mistake retroactively. But this is perhaps the most persuasive reason for the provision of record-playback-compare equipment. Monitoring is most effective when the student is listening to the playback of his own version of the practice. He can be directed to stop, back up, and replay his error until he has not only recognized it but produced an appropriate correction.

TESTING

As Rebecca M. Vallette has pointed out,[13] testing in the laboratory can solve many of the problems of student interest and participation in laboratory work. The nature of the testing is contingent on the type of laboratory and the amount of time available within scheduled lab periods for test administration, together with the amount of staff time available for test preparation and correction. In the Delaware experiments, all testing during the term was done in regularly scheduled laboratory periods, as was a part of the final examination. All of the tests involved oral production, auditory recognition, and writing. Even where equipment permits the recording of answers only, the time required to grade student recordings assumes onerous proportions as enrollments grow. Audio tests requiring only written answers of the type described by Professor Valette are adaptable to even the audio-passive laboratory. I fully endorse her suggestion of adding a short quiz to the end of each lesser tape. Should this prove impracticable, the laboratory program should provide for longer units at intervals of no more than two weeks, with provision in the overall program for adequate review.

While the practice of grading is under attack in many institutions, "being graded on" laboratory performance will continue to be a powerful incentive in those institutions where grades are still part of the academic pattern. With or without grades, the effectiveness of the test as a teaching device is enhanced if it is corrected promptly and returned no later than the next regularly scheduled meeting of the class in which it was administered. In scoring tests administered in the laboratory, it can be helpful to provide a "cue sheet" which contains not only the recording script of the test as administered but the expected reply. Corrections are indicated on the cue sheet which is distributed to the students with their test recordings and/or papers. It is desirable to provide the learner

an opportunity to hear the test again with the corrections before him. This may be done on a library basis outside of regular laboratory hours. The cue sheet may preclude immediate reuse of the same test, but this disadvantage is outweighed by the pedagogical impact.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Effective coordination of foreign language laboratory and class activities is dependent on the willingness of the individual teacher to exploit the advantages offered by the laboratory. Also essential are the selection of appropriate audio-visual materials, the scheduling of frequent opportunities for required language laboratory practice, the proper programming of materials selected, and the regular use of the language laboratory for testing.

FOOTNOTES

1. Stack, Edward M., "The classroom and the language laboratory are complementary parts of an efficient instructional system." The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 145.

2. See Nostrand, Howard Lee, et al, Research on Language Teaching: An Annotated International Bibliography, 1945-64, 2nd ed. rev. (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington, 1965) for annotated references to publications on the language laboratory. Other bibliographic tools with references to articles and books on the laboratory are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (National Cash Register Co., 4936 Fairmont Ave., Bethesda, Md. 20014); orders must specify the order (ED) number, the kind of reproduction desired (MF—microfiche; HC—hard copy) and check or cash must be enclosed: Birkmaier, Emma Marie and Dale L. Lange (Compilers), A Selective Bibliography on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1920—1966, 1967, 43 p. (ED 024 293 MF—$0.25 HC—$2.25; Mathieu, Gustave Bording, ed. MLabstracts, 1961-66, 1969, 374 p. (ED 026 937 MF—$1.50 HC—$18.80); Harmon, John T., ed. Annual Bibliography on the Teaching of Foreign Languages—1967, 1968, 61 p. (ED 021 152 MF—$0.50 HC—$3.15); Lange, Dale L., ed., Annual Bibliography on the teaching of Foreign Languages—1968, 1969, 50 p. (ED 029 158 MF—$0.25 HC—$2.65). Succeeding annual bibliographies on the teaching of foreign languages are scheduled to appear regularly in the May issue of Foreign Language Annals (62 Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011).

3. The writer has observed situations similar to the one described in a number of school and college classrooms along the Eastern seaboard. And participants at five NDEA Summer Institutes confirm that this approach to the language laboratory is prevalent in most, if not all, of our fifty states.

4. For an excellent summary of the advantages offered by the language laboratory, see: Childers, J. Wesley, Foreign Language Teaching (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964), pp. 87-88.

5. This may be true with speech habits for some pupils where the playback portion of the exercise is unmonitored. However, a four-year experiment conducted in the New York City high schools during 1959-63 indicates that record-playback or "audio-active-compare" capability is productive in other skill areas, notably comprehension of the rapidly spoken target language—in the case of the experiment, French. See: Lorge, Sarah W., "Foreign Language Laboratories in Secondary Schools: A Special Report Summarizing Four Years of Research by the Bureau of Audio-Visual Instruction, Board of Education of the City of New York, 1959-63." Audio-Visual Learning, Vol. 7, No. 1 (October-November, 1963), and Lorge, Sarah W., "Language Laboratory Research Studies in New York City High Schools: A Discussion of the Program and the Findings," Modern Language Journal, XLVIII (November 1964), 409-419.

6. This is to allow for maintenance without interruption of schedule in case of mechanical or electronic failure.

7. Daily periods of twenty minutes each proved most effective in the New York City experiment referred to above.

8. Reported under the title, "Class, Laboratory, and Credit Hours in Beginning Modern Languages." Modern Language Journal, XLVII (January, 1963), 23-25.

9. During the period the writer was associated with this program (1955-66) the pattern described became mandatory for all students of Spanish and Russian. French and German, however, retained a "two-track" system in which the audio-lingual courses were optional, and students of those languages were permitted to elect a three-hour-per-week traditional course in lieu of the audio-lingual sections which met five hours a week for four hours credit.

10. Feldman, David M. and Walter D. Kline, Spanish: Contemporary Methodology (Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1969), p. 87.

11. Brooks, Nelson, Language and Language Learning (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 120.

12. The writer's experience includes work with laboratories accommodating from twenty to ninety students in one laboratory session.

13. In her article, "Laboratory Quizzes: A Means of Increasing Laboratory Effectiveness," Foreign Language Annals, I (October 1967), 45-48.